

## Removal of mercury on course

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Nevada is easing its stance on the proposed move there of 2,617 tons of mercury from the Defense Logistics Agency depot. The state of Nevada is no longer vehemently opposing the movement of 2,617 tons of mercury from the Defense Logistics Agency depot on Route 206 to Hawthorne Army Depot in Mineral County, Nev. Instead, officials are seeking to regulate it, said Dante Pistone, spokesman for the Nevada Division of Environmental Protection.

"There is still some opposition in the governor's office, but the reality is it's probably coming," Mr. Pistone said. "We've already gotten approval to regulate it at the state level."

The state of Nevada will levy a fee for storage of mercury at the Hawthorne Army Depot, based on 100 tons of mercury per process, or warehouse where the mercury is stored.

In mid- to late April 2007, the Defense National Stockpile Center (DNSC) will move approximately 4,436 metric tons of mercury from its depots in Hillsborough; Warren, Ohio; and New Haven, Ind., said DNSC spokesman Robert Jones.

"We will move all the mercury to the Hawthorne depot," Mr. Jones said. "They have 13 or 14 warehouses, so that's about 300 to 400 tons each ... the bottom line is that there will be a fee for the excess mercury stored per process, per warehouse." Hillsborough Mayor Carl Suraci said Tuesday that the move couldn't come soon enough.

"We'll feel better when the first trucks start rolling," he said. "There's been constant pressure here and from Congressman (Mike) Ferguson's office for the DLA to consolidate the mercury stockpile to a less populated area."

In February, Nevada Gov. Kenny Guinn issued a statement opposing consolidation and storage of the strategic mercury stockpile, citing previous waste disposal and land restrictions in the state.

The statement also cited the Army depot's proximity to Walker Lake, where stored mercury could cause environmental problems if it leaks.

"We comply with all federal, state and local regulations," said Herman Millsap, civilian head of Hawthorne Army Depot.

The strategic mercury stockpile was accumulated during and after World War II when mercury was needed for such uses as aircraft instruments. Most of the supply — about 2,500 tons — was stored at the GSA Belle Mead Depot, where it had been placed in lead flasks and sealed.

When the Belle Mead Depot closed in the 1960s, the mercury was moved to a depot operated by the Defense Logistics Agency, north on Route 206.

In 2000, an earlier effort to consolidate supplies brought an additional 220 tons to Hillsborough from a New York depot that was closed down. After local officials complained of the lack of protection for the warehouses and signs the aging flasks were leaking, the DLA upgraded the facility and placed the flasks inside double-lined and sealed containers.

According to Mr. Jones, the mercury is now kept in flasks — lead containers that resemble 2-liter soda bottles — in double-lined 30-gallon drums.

Ashwani Singh, Hawthorne Army Depot public information officer and operations director, said he believed the mercury would be stored in overhead magazines with a tight security system, but Mr. Jones said he believed they would be stored as they are now.

Mercury, an element in the earth's crust, cannot be created or destroyed by people and it has traditionally been used to make products such as thermometers, switches and some light bulbs.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, mercury in the air eventually settles into water or onto land where it can be washed into water. Once it is deposited, certain microorganisms can change it into methylmercury, a highly toxic form that builds up in fish, shellfish and animals that eat fish. The main source of methylmercury exposure in humans is consumption of contaminated fish and shellfish.

Mercury exposure at high levels can harm the brain, heart, kidneys, lungs and immune system of people of all ages, and cause birth complications for pregnant women. For more information on the strategic mercury stockpile, visit the Mercury Management Environmental Impact Statement Web site: [www.mercuryeis.com](http://www.mercuryeis.com).

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